1: Lowie E-5 (1926) 1939 NT20 Washo NT20

ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTES ON THE WASHO

BY

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I. INTRODUCTION

A SKETCH by Barrett, mainly relating to museum specimens, Kroeber's list of kinship terms, Hudson's notes on games in Culin's monograph, and a few mythological texts by Dangberg constitute our technical sources on the Washo.[1] Several weeks at Minden, Nevada (informant, Dave Cheney), and at Coleville, California (principal informants, Jack Pitts and Bill Cornbread), in 1926 supplied the data here offered.

The Washo (waco, wɔco), classed either as an isolated stock or as an aberrant Hokan group, ranged about Lake Tahoe (t'i''yeli ta''au), residing in westernmost Nevada and easternmost California. Carson City, Reno, Minden, and Gardnerville, Nevada, fall within ancient Washo territory, as do Truckee, Tallac, and Woodfords, California. According to Barrett, even a small region west of the Sierra, on the headwaters of the Mokelumne, Calaveras, and Stanislaus rivers, falls within the Washo area. Kroeber sets their total number in 1770 at possibly 1500, one-third of the total being in California, where more recent figures indicate approximately 300. But separatism was extreme: Jack Pitts had been to Lake Tahoe a single time, political units hardly embraced more than six or seven families, and only festivals united larger gatherings.

Bill distinguished the Washo about Woodfords and of Antelope Valley as ha'ɣalɛ'lt'i, those near Minden and Gardnerville being p'a''walu, and the Reno Washo wɛ'lmɛlt'i. Though distinct, these groups had never waged war with one another. Bill associated the Washo with Mountain House and Bagley Valley but did not consider Antelope Valley ancient Washo territory, rather assigning it to the "Paiute," that is, Paviotso. When about 30, he himself came there, and at that time there were not many Washo in that locality.

Three alien tribes figure prominently: the "Paiute," that is, Paviotso (pa''le.u), whom the Carson Valley Washo sometimes visited near the Walker River; the "Digger," that is, Maidu (teobi'muc), about Placerville and Colfax; and "another kind of Digger" (tannu'), distinct in speech from the Maidu,—presumably Miwok. The two former were definitely noted as periodically hostile, the Washo trying to exclude both from Lake Tahoe. The Maidu often took game away from the Washo, even killing them, and thus precipitated fighting.

[1] S. A. Barrett, The Washo, PMM-B 2:1-52, 1917. Grace Dangberg, Washo Texts, UC-PAAE 22:391-443, 1927. A. L. Kroeber, Handbook of the Indians of California, BAE-B 78:569-573, 944, 1925. S. Culin, Games of the North American Indians, BAE-B 24:199, 265, 322 f., 335, 396, 523, 664, 704, 1907.

[P. 300 is blank]

Inheritance
is essentially lacking, but rights in eagle series and certain pinenut groves did pass on from the father and mother to their children. The Washo had a kind of "moiety" division for games at festivals, but these appear to relate more to residence than kinship. 428 616 526 574

The major concrete kinship group was the extended family. It occupied a single house (galis dangal) and was composed of one, sometimes two, nuclear families who were consanguinally related. A few more distant relatives or even non-relatives were often attached. 596

The household, in addition to being the primary kinship group, was also the basic economic and political group. It was in theory and practice an autonomous, sovereign unit of society. Beyond the household, in the wider groupings of social organization, the divisions are not clearly defined. For present purposes we can say that the levels of social organization were (1) the household (called here galis dangal after the name of the winter house), (2) the community (angale atega, "houses together"), (3) the band, and (4) the tribal territorial divisions (w¢lm¢lti, pauwalu, and hangal¢lti). 592 596 [621] [619]

There was no generic term for bands, and these, as all actual groups of people, were referred to by the name of their geographical location or the personal names of band members. The "band" is defined here as several cooperating communities from the same sector of Washo territory which came together for antelope and rabbit drives, puberty ceremonies, and other social occasions. The Washo living in the vicinity of the town of Woodfords today thus constitute a band. They comprise a collection of four communities scattered around Woodfords with close ties with the few Washo who live in neighboring Markleeville and Paynesville. Band lines were weak and existed more by the facts of economic cooperation and general social relations than by kinship or political leadership. 621 [628]

Washo bands had a less "corporate" character than those described by Steward (1938) for the aboriginal Owens Valley Paiute and certain Great Basin bands that developed after the introduction of the horse. The corporate character of the Owens Valley Paiute bands is seen in band ownership and defense of hunting and seed territories, a band chief, and band cooperation in a communal sweat house and communal irrigation. [171]

It appears that an older man (often complemented by his wife) who was economically active would attract a following of several related, and perhaps some unrelated, households to form a community around a spring or along a stream. There was no structural position for headman (d¢tumo) beyond the [592] 622

1. These two cases may be simply extensions of levirate privileges since the second marriages were to younger brothers. In one case the older brother was crippled. [587]

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The Washo lacked well tailored clothing necessary for extensive winter travel. Their techniques of production were geared to small scale household [291] use so that tradeable surpluses were rarely acquired. The Washo were [433] organized into small scale groupings with few specilizations of labor. They [621] lacked adequate storage techniques for fish and game so that surpluses in these foods were not preserved. Also inter-tribal frictions and hatreds often [463] prevented safe travel outside of Washo territory. There are indications that [251] once the Whites established an effective government over Washo and surrounding territory, trade and marriage between Indians from different tribes [628] increased significantly. The Carson Indian Boarding School, established [648] in 1890, became an important factor in developing intertribal cooperation by providing a situation in which individuals from several tribes could meet and [871] become friends.

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Certain kinds of goods were particularly heavy in the trade traffic of aboriginal Great Basin and California. Davis (1961, 12-4) gives an idea of what these items were in California. In order of importance they were marine shells and beads, salt, basketry, hides and pelts, bows, acorns, fish, pinenuts, obsidian, pigments, miscellaneous vegetal foods, rabbit skin blankets, arrows, and a number of less important items.

In one table Davis (ibid., pp. 12-4) lists 83 traded items. The Washo used 53 of these items. Except for five items made of marine shells and "Caucasian goods", all 53 of the items used by the Washo were gathered or made by the Washo.

Pacific coast beads and pendants were used for personal adornment, but [301] they were unimportant in face of the competition with local shell, plant, [439] bone, and stone materials.

It is probable that all of the 53 items in the list by Davis were occasionally [439] received by Washo from non-Washo through trade. Even items that were abundant within Washo territory such as pinenuts, fish, basketry, and rabbit skin blankets may have been received by trade in special instances. Lists of things traded are of little value unless they reflect volume.

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The goods most exported to the Miwok and Maidu were salt, pinenuts, obsidian, skins, and several Washo manufactures such as rabbit skin blankets and basketry. In return the Washo received principally acorns, soaproot for combs and brushes, a variety of medicinal plants, and occasionally manufactures such as baskets and yew bows. Few acorns were received by the Washo through trade unless the local crop was poor. All the other plants traded were received primarily through gathering and not trade.

Both Davis (1961) and Sample (1950), in their summaries of California [114] trade, repeated a view held by Barrett and Gifford (1933, 193, 221). It is

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lowest level of a seven point scale of culture for native North America.

Trade, warfare, and communication provide the avenues for cultural diffusion. 433
If these avenues of communication lead to technologically advanced cultures, 439
we can expect economic development even if custom is sanctified and the 177
force of tradition is great. The greatest barrier to Washo economic development seems to have been their isolated territorial location. They were isolated from the surrounding high cultures in the Southwest, California, and the Northwest Coast. Barriers to trade were discussed above (pp. 50-51): mountain [133]
terrain, language differences, climatic extremes, lack of significant tradeable [628]
surpluses, location of sufficient resources within Washo territory, and inter-tribal hatreds. These barriers to trade were also barriers to economic development in that lines of diffusion remained weak.

Washo society was neither inventively productive nor absorptive. It does 433
not appear to represent a focal point for the development of any new and 178
more efficient solutions to the problems of survival. It appears rather, to have developed from big game hunting to a slightly more efficient base of [177]
hunting, fishing, and gathering. This development may have derived from the influence of Shoshoneans. More efficient techniques of gathering and storing fish might have raised their economy to the level of most Californians. Even in historic times the Washo have been slow in adopting agriculture and animal husbandry.

Manning Nash (Adams, et al, n.d., 23) suggested that the household was 433
not a very viable unit for economic expansion "because it is such a multi- 592
functional unit." Unlike the modern business firm, the household has many non-economic functions which conflict with its economic functions. This multifunctional character was present in all Washo socioeconomic groups.

The fact that the Washo did survive in their environment with a simple 433
technology attests to the culture's efficiency and viability. We simply raise the question of why they did not develop a more advanced economy and suggest that the kind of economy they had, with little inter-tribal trade and an orientation to the household, was a barrier to this development.

Prestige Economy and Money

The concept of a "prestige economy" came into use after DuBois (1936, 50) 433
defined the economic involvement in acquiring prestige among the Tolowa- 554
Tututni. She defined prestige economy as "a series of social prerogatives

9: d'Azevedo et al. E-4,5 (1952-1961) 1963 NT20 Washo NT20
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Thus the area in which the Washo lived was somewhat more varied than the territories of other groups, encompassing four life zones. This contrasted to the condition of the Paiute as a whole, where some bands existed in relative luxury for gatherers, and others occupied extremely inhospitable areas. The Washo, as a whole, enjoyed a fairly favorable area for hunting and gathering. In aboriginal times there seems to have been little effort to drive other groups out of the area when they entered it to hunt or gather, suggesting that the Washo felt they were amid plenty and that added exploitation would not deprive them. This does not hold for their view of the pinenut areas they utilized. They defended these with vigor, as they also defended fishing sites. There appears to have been a sufficient supply of nuts to permit very large gatherings in the fall at the beginning of the harvest season.

As with the Paiute, the Washo family appears to have been the primary unit of social organization. Families combined into bands that may or may not have had more permanence of membership than did those of the Paiute. Informants insist that families decided the course of their yearly movement independent of any band activities, either joining other bands or going on hunting and gathering treks -- often as far as the Pacific coast -- by themselves.

Band leaders had little, if any, more authority than did their counterparts among the Paiute. When bands gathered for antelope or rabbit hunting a shaman or rabbit boss took charge of the actual hunting operation as was true elsewhere in the Basin. Mountain sheep and mule deer were hunted in small informal groups, the latter occasionally in communal hunts.

The Washo recognized different areas within their territory but to what degree people or bands remained within these territories is not known. Lowie (1939, 301-52) sees incipient moiety formation in this division, but its only expression appears to have been the selection of members of teams to play games during the annual pinenut festival. Certain groups living in the mountains near what is today Woodfords were viewed by other Washo as "crazy," i.e., particularly brave, unpredictable and fierce. This was because, according to informants, these people had a great deal of association with California tribes (Downs, 1961b). The Woodfords group appears to have served traditionally as Washo "shock troops," being called upon for help whenever it was necessary to fight neighboring Indians. Freed (1960, 353) reports that a leader could assemble fighting men by sending a knotted deerhide string to his supporters. My own informants corroborated this but made it clear that no one was compelled to respond. There is no record of interband hostility even to the degree mentioned above for the Paiute.